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(54) Gaming machines

(57) A fruit machine incorporates a game feature whereby, when the reels or simulated reels have stopped rotating during a game, one or more lamps 7 associated with the reels may be lit indicating that the player may press one or more skip buttons 6 associated with the lamps 7. When the player presses one of the skip

buttons 6, the associated reel will be caused to rotate in one of two opposite directions so as to render a fruit symbol on the reel visible to the player within the viewing window 8 which was not previously visible. By pressing one or more of the skip buttons, therefore, the player is given a further chance of obtaining a winning combination of fruit symbols along any of the three combination lines 9, 10 and 11.

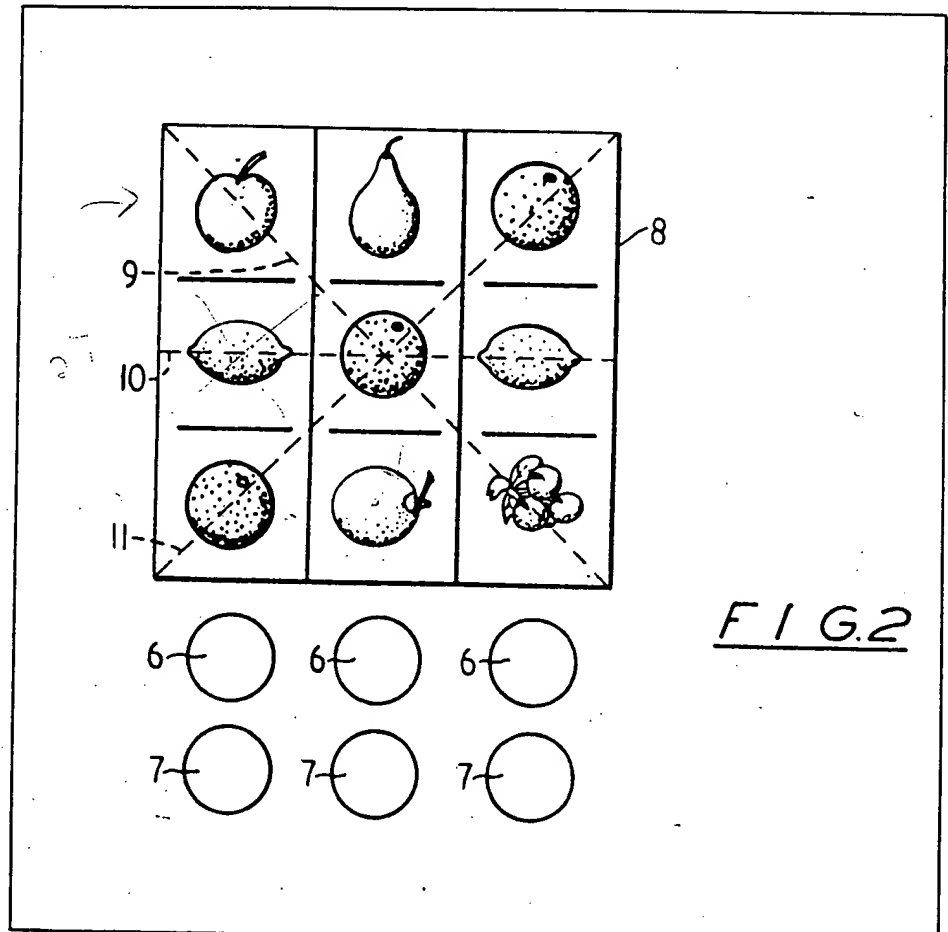
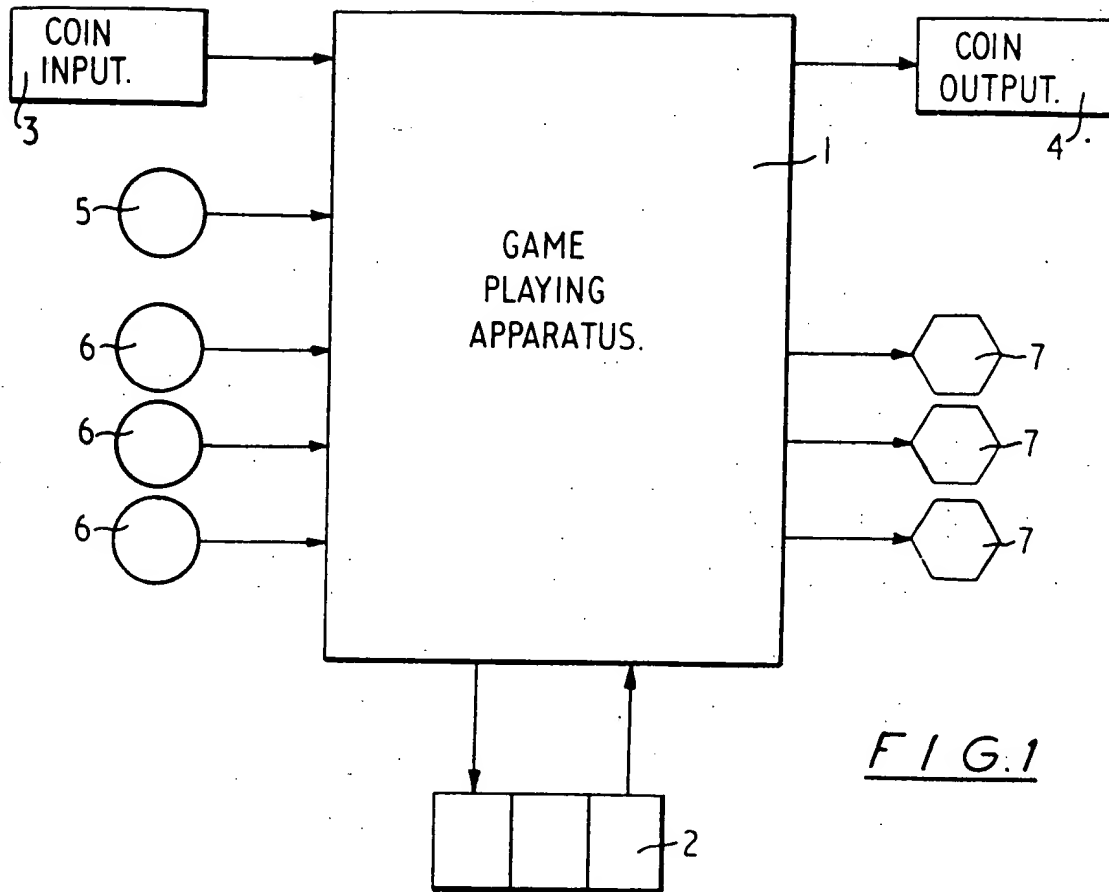
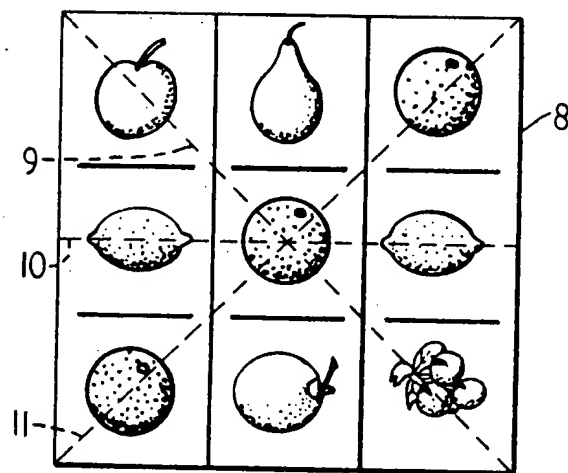
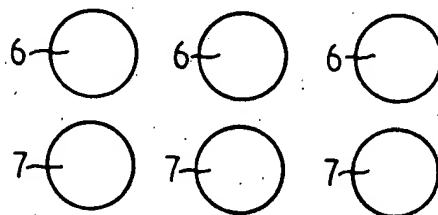


FIG. 2

FIG. 1FIG. 2

SPECIFICATION

Gaming machines

This invention relates to gaming machines, and is more particularly, but not exclusively, concerned with gaming machines of the type known as "fruit" machines.

A fruit machine basically comprises rotary or quasi-rotary members, which may be reels, a representation of reels on a video or projection screen, or flexible strips as described in the applicants' co-pending Application No. 8001366, bearing fruit and/or other symbols, and means for rotating the members or simulating rotation of the members and stopping them in random positions which are indicated by the symbols on a combination line visible to the player through a viewing window. Alternatively the machine may comprise display units, generally in the form of an array of lights, adapted to display the symbols, and means for cyclically changing the symbols displayed by the units and stopping the cycling so as to display a randomly selected combination of symbols through the viewing window.

In machines in which not only the symbols on the combination line but also at least one other line of symbols is visible through the viewing window, it is known to provide the machine with a "nudge" feature in the form of a respective nudge button associated with each rotary member. At the end of a game, when the rotation of the members has been stopped, the player may be given the option of depressing one or more of the nudge buttons in order to move on to the combination line one or more symbols previously visible to the player but not on the combination line so as to complete a winning combination, as described in Specification No. 1,292,712. It is also known to provide a machine with other features, such as a "hold" feature, which may be operated by a player at the end of a game. It is an object of the invention to provide an entirely novel feature for a fruit machine or other gaming machine which adds interest to the game and increases the chances of obtaining a winning combination.

According to the invention there is provided a gaming machine comprising a plurality of rotary or quasi-rotary members bearing symbols, or a plurality of display units adapted to display symbols and capable of being cycled to change the symbols displayed, a game-initiating switch which, when actuated by a player, normally causes at least three rotary members to be rotated or at least three display units to be cycled before coming to rest with a combination of symbols visible to the player in one or more combination lines, and at least one game-feature switch which, when actuated by a player, causes at least one of the rotary members to be rotated, or at least one of the display units to be cycled, so as to move on to a combination line at least one symbol which was not previously visible to the player and which thereby completes or contributes to a winning combination.

The term "quasi-rotary member" as used above

and elsewhere in this specification is intended to denote a video or projected image of a rotary member, and it should be understood that, where rotation of a rotary member is referred to, this is intended to cover simulated rotation of a video or projected image of a rotary member. Normal operation of the rotary members or display units in response to actuation of the game-initiating switch is considered to occur when none of said at least three rotary members or display units is inhibited by a hold feature. Furthermore it should be understood that, although a symbol of one of the rotary members or display units may be identical to the symbol of another of the rotary members or display units or to another symbol of the same rotary member or display unit, these symbols are treated as being different symbols for the purposes of this specification.

The player may therefore be given the option at the end of a game, or even before or during a game, of operating at least one game-feature switch in order to provide the player with a second chance of obtaining a winning combination. Such a game feature may be referred to as a "skip" feature.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment a respective game-feature switch is associated with each rotary or quasi-rotary member or display unit, each game-feature switch, when actuated by a player, causing the associated member to be rotated or to appear to rotate, or the associated unit to be cycled, so as to move on to a combination line a symbol on that member or unit which was not previously visible to the player and which thereby completes or contributes to a winning combination.

Moreover it is preferred that the control arrangement of the machine should be adapted to control the members or units such that, on actuation of the or each game-feature switch, the associated member(s) or unit(s) is rotated or cycled in one or other of two opposite directions in dependence on a control signal. For example, the direction in which a particular member or unit is rotated or cycled on actuation of an associated game-feature switch may be determined randomly or in accordance with the result of a preceding game or in accordance with the skill exhibited by a player in depressing a skill button as disclosed in the applicants' co-pending Application No. 8029163.

Furthermore the control arrangement is preferably such that actuation of the or each game-feature switch will only cause the associated member(s) or unit(s) to be rotated or cycled when so enabled by a control function. For example, enabling of the game-feature switches and selection of the game-feature switches which are to be enabled may be determined randomly or in accordance with the result of a preceding game or in accordance with the skill exhibited by a player in depressing a skill button.

Also the control arrangement may be adapted to control the extent of the rotation or cycling of the associated member(s) or unit(s) on actuation

of the or each game-feature switch. For example, the distance through which a particular member or unit is rotated or cycled on actuation of an associate game-feature switch may be determined randomly or in accordance with the result of a preceding game or in accordance with the skill exhibited by a player in depressing a skill button. Alternatively the extent of the rotation or cycling on actuation of the or each adjustment switch may be fixed.

In order that the invention may be more fully understood, reference will now be made, by way of example, to the accompanying drawing, in which:

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a fruit machine in accordance with the invention; and

Figure 2 shows a viewing window of the machine of Figure 1.

The actual game playing apparatus 1 may be a mechanical, electromechanical, electronic or microprocessor controller-based device using an electromechanical, stepper-motor-driven or video reel mechanism 2. A coin input 3 is provided for receipt of a coin when a game is to be played and a coin output 4 is provided for paying out coins in the event of a win. A game-initiating button 5, when actuated to play a game, causes the reels of the reel mechanism 2 to rotate and to stop in random positions. When the reels stop fruit symbols on the reels are visible through a viewing window 8. If the combination of fruit symbols along any one of three combination lines 9, 10 and 11 is equivalent to a winning combination, the player is awarded a win. Depending on the fruit symbols visible through the window 8, the player may be given the option of pressing one or more of three skip buttons 6 as indicated by the lighting of one or more lamps 7. On actuation of the indicated skip button or buttons 6, the or each associated reel is rotated by an amount which is less than one complete revolution of the reel, so as to move one or more symbols on to one of the combination lines 9, 10 and 11 which was not previously visible through the window 8 and which thereby completes a winning combination. The player is then awarded a win or a further win. The amount by which the or each reel is rotated is randomly determined with the proviso that a winning combination should result. The rotation of the reels is continuous so that the symbols cannot be individually distinguished whilst the reels are rotating, and the player will not know which winning combination will result from actuation of the or each skip button until the reels have stopped.

In a modification of the above described machine, which is not illustrated, a game-feature reel is provided alongside the window 8 parallel to the other reels which does not normally rotate in response to actuation of the game-initiating button 5. When a lamp associated with the game-feature reel is lit, the player is given the option of pressing an associated skip button so as to move on to the combination line 10 a symbol on the game-feature reel which was not previously visible

to the player and which completes or contributes to a winning combination when substituted for one of the other symbols on the combination line 10. The symbol which is to be substituted for may either be selected by the player by pressing a button or maybe automatically selected by the machine.

CLAIMS

1. A gaming machine comprising a plurality of rotary or quasi-rotary members bearing symbols, or a plurality of display units adapted to display symbols and capable of being cycled to change the symbols displayed, a game-initiating switch which, when actuated by a player, normally causes at least three rotary or quasi-rotary members to be rotated or to appear to rotate or at least three display units to be cycled before coming to rest with a combination of symbols visible to the player on one or more combination lines, and at least one game-feature switch which, when actuated by a player, causes at least one of the rotary members or quasi-rotary members to be rotated or to appear to rotate, or at least one of the display units to be cycled, so as to move on to a combination line at least one symbol which was not previously visible to the player and which thereby completes or contributes to a winning combination.

2. A gaming machine according to claim 1, wherein a respective game-feature switch is associated with each rotary or quasi-rotary member or display unit, each game-feature switch, when actuated by a player, causing the associated member to be rotated or to appear to rotate, or the associated unit to be cycled, so as to move on to a combination line a symbol on that member or unit which was not previously visible to the player and which thereby completes or contributes to a winning combination.

3. A gaming machine according to claim 1 or 2, wherein a game-feature switch is associated with a game-feature rotary or quasi-rotary member or display unit which is not normally rotated or cycled on actuation of the game-initiating switch, said game-feature switch, when actuated by a player, causing the associated member to be rotated to appear to rotate, or the associated unit to be cycled, to move on to a combination line a symbol on that member or unit which was not previously visible to the player and which thereby completes or contributes to a winning combination.

4. A gaming machine according to claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein the control arrangement of the machine is adapted to control the members or units such that, on actuation of the or each game-feature switch, the associated member(s) or unit(s) is rotated or cycled in one or other of two opposite directions in dependence on a control signal.

5. A gaming machine according to claim 4, wherein the direction in which a particular member or unit is rotated or cycled on actuation of

an associated game-feature switch is determined randomly.

- 5 6. A gaming machine according to claim 4, wherein the direction in which a particular member or unit is rotated or cycled on actuation of an associated game-feature switch is determined in accordance with the result of a preceding game.

- 10 7. A gaming machine according to claim 4, wherein the direction in which a particular member or unit is rotated or cycled on actuation of an associated game-feature switch is determined in accordance with the skill exhibited by a player in actuating skill means.

- 15 8. A gaming machine according to any preceding claim, wherein the control arrangement of the machine is such that actuation of the or each game-feature switch will only cause the associated member(s) or unit(s) to be rotated or cycled when so enabled by a control function.

- 20 9. A gaming machine according to claim 8, wherein enabling of the game-feature switches and selection of the game-feature switches which are to be enabled is determined randomly.

- 25 10. A gaming machine according to claim 8, wherein enabling of the game-feature switches and selection of the game-feature switches which are to be enabled is determined in accordance with the result of a preceding game.

- 30 11. A gaming machine according to claim 8, wherein enabling of the game-feature switches and selection of the game-feature switches which

are to be enabled is determined in accordance with the skill exhibited by a player in actuating skill means.

- 35 12. A gaming machine according to any preceding claim, wherein the control arrangement of the machine is adapted to control the extent of the rotation or cycling of the associated member(s) or unit(s) on actuation of the or each game-feature switch.

- 40 13. A gaming machine according to claim 12, wherein the distance through which a particular member or unit is rotated or cycled on actuation of an associated game-feature switch is determined randomly.

- 45 14. A gaming machine according to claim 12, wherein the distance through which a particular member or unit is rotated or cycled on actuation of an associated game-feature switch is determined in accordance with the result of a preceding game.

- 50 15. A gaming machine according to claim 12, wherein the distance through which a particular member or unit is rotated or cycled on actuation of an associated game-feature switch is determined in accordance with the skill exhibited by a player in actuating skill means.

- 55 16. A gaming machine according to any preceding claim, being a fruit machine.

- 60 17. A gaming machine substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawing.